CASTLEMAINE NATURALIST

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CASTLEMAINE FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB INC.
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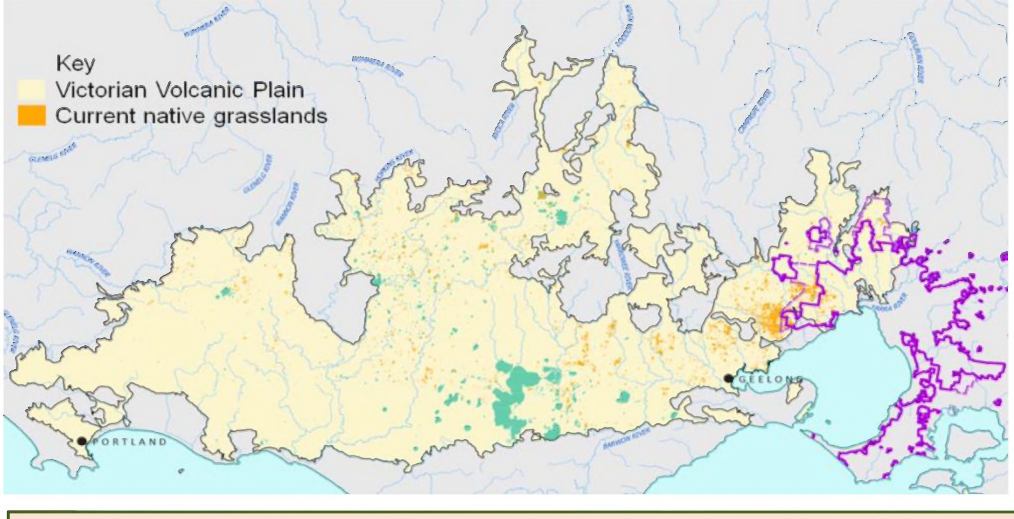
Resupinatus aff. merulioides
Photo: Joy Clusker

Protecting and Restoring our Grassy Plains

Within Victoria there are three main native grassland ecosystems. The Alpine Grasslands are restricted to above 1500m on our highest peaks and fall entirely within our national park system. The Northern Plains Grasslands occur on the plains north of Bendigo, including areas such as Terrick Terrick and Kerang and west through to the edge of the low dunes of the mallee country. The third grassland ecosystem is the western Victorian Volcanic Plains ecosystem which once extended from the north of Melbourne through to near the South Australian border with a northern extension that includes the Moolort Plains.



Victorian Volcanic Plain Grasslands.

Pre 1776 most of the Victorian Volcanic Plain was native grasslands.

This ecosystem extended north to near Eddington and included the Moolort Plains.

Source: Delivering Melbourne's newest sustainable communities: Strategic impact assessment report, DSE, October 2009.

CFNC Weekend at Wedderburn, 12-14 September, 2025. Registrations required by August 8th - see "Coming Events" page.

The Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club acknowledges the Dja Dja Wurrung community as the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the Country where we meet and study the natural environment. We pay our respects to their Elders, past, present and future.

Adrian Marshall, our July speaker, is the facilitator for the Grassy Plains Network hosted by the Victorian National Parks Association (VNPA). Adrian started by showing us what a native grassland should look like when healthy, then went on to explain that less than 0.5% of the pre-European extent of the Victorian Volcanic Plains grasslands remain in reasonable condition and much of what remains is unprotected. The Northern Plains Grasslands are also critically endangered.

The first point Adrian made is that native grasslands are more than "just grass". A healthy native grassland (< 50% introduced weed cover) will have a variety of grasses as well as a wide range of other flowering plants which grow in the gaps between the grasses and are restricted to grasslands. There is also an associated grassland fauna which is dependent on the grasslands such as reptiles and small mammals.

Many of these species are threatened. Some are only known from a single small patch or from roadsides. Often these patches lack any form of protection. There are 60 grassland plant species that are listed as threatened in Victoria. Adrian gave the example of the Hobsons Bay Council area where at least 67 plant species have become locally extinct and a further 37 species are listed as threatened at a state level. In the Hume Council area, 91 grassland plant species are only known from a single location with 27 of these species occurring in the 3Ha Evans St Grassland Reserve at Sunbury.

Below: A healthy native grassland showing a mixture of grasses and forbs with bare ground between plants.

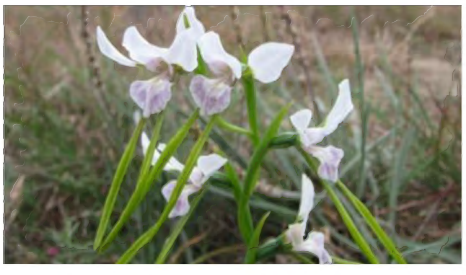
Photo: Adrian Marshall / VNPA

Fat-tailed Dunnart is a small carnivorous marsupial found only in native grasslands.

Photo:

Emily Scicluna.

When it comes to protecting grasslands, size may not be the most important factor. As the Evans St example shows, a small area may have very high conservation value. Some of our most threatened species only persist in very small remnants of their former habitat.



Sunshine Diuris is a critically endangered native orchid now restricted to a single small reserve within suburban Melbourne.

Photo: Colleen Miller.

Native grasslands require active management if they are to persist. One of the most effective management tools in this situation is periodic burning to remove dead material from grasses and kill excessive woody vegetation which in turn allows the germination of forbs in the inter-tussock spaces. It should be noted at this point that many of the pasture and weed species that encroach on native grasslands e.g. *Phalaris sp.*, create greater fuel loads and are more fire prone than the native species they are replacing.

Adrian then went on to describe some of the many threats to native grasslands. An existential threat is the lack of community recognition and appreciation of native grasslands. It is essential that people care about the grasslands and for that to happen there must be opportunities to show local communities the values in their local patch.

Adrian has been organising community open days in grassland reserves in Melbourne's western suburbs. People also need to have access to grassland reserves that they can explore in their own way and these reserves must look like they are cared for so that visitors will also care for them. Increased community recognition of grasslands will also help reduce other instances of mismanagement.

Mismanagement can take many forms, but lack of fire and inadequate weed control are key areas. Mowing is also an issue when it occurs at the wrong time and prevents flowering and seeding. Some of our most important native grasslands are along roadsides and railways where maintenance of transport and communication infrastructure can cause significant damage.

Large areas of native grassland are being destroyed when native pastures are converted to cropping. Modern machinery can more easily remove the rocks that naturally occur on the volcanic plains allowing cultivation. Other losses occur when firebreaks are ploughed along the road reserve adjacent to crops.

Within the Melbourne Growth Boundary where some of the most important native grasslands persist, there are issues with illegal clearing when subdivisions are created. In some cases offsets may be required and developers contribute to a fund for grassland protection however these are never enough to replace what is lost. Offsets always result in a net loss of biodiversity.

The illegal dumping of rubbish on public land is a major issue. Native grasslands have been badly affected by this and while there are some prosecutions they never seem sufficient to deter these actions.

The final threat that Adrian mentioned was government action and inaction at all levels. Government backed construction projects and changes to planning schemes have resulted in the loss of remnant grasslands. Governments have been very slow to protect what is left of these ecosystems and in the case of the Melbourne Growth Area this procrastination has resulted in more expensive reserve acquisition and greater loss of remaining grasslands. There has also been a lack of resources for proper management of these areas and for taking legal action against those who deliberately damage protected areas.

On a more positive note, Adrian went on to discuss current work that the Grassy Plains Network is doing. This includes talks and grassland events for local communities to encourage them to understand and value the grasslands. Interpretive signage is being installed and support given for Landcare and similar groups who are working to restore native grasslands. A “Cues to Care” program aims to make the reserves more welcoming to the public and look cared for rather than neglected so that they are seen as an attractive community asset. Investigations into the best way to restore a native grassland are also taking place. Seed nurseries for grassland plants are being established to overcome the limitation of insufficient seed for restoration work.

Thank you, Adrian, for a very informative and valuable talk.

And there is hope.

In 2023 the Victorian Grassland Earless Dragon was rediscovered having been considered possibly extinct.

The previous sighting was in 1969.

Other species are sure to be out there waiting to be discovered or rediscovered if only we take the time to look!

Photo: John Wombey / CSIRO

Euan Moore

To learn more about native grasslands and grassy woodlands join us on our Excursion on Saturday 9th August when we will visit some remnant grasslands near Baringhup. See ‘Current Events’ page of newsletter for details.

Stunning boulders covered with moss and lichen on Mt. Alexander.

Photo: Jenny Rolland

Fungi Search with Joy Clusker – July 12th Excursion

We returned to the tall cool forest of Mt Alexander for our fungi search this year, heartened by some recent rains after a very dry period. We were privileged to have Joy Clusker, co-author with Ray Wallace of "Fungi of the Bendigo Region – a Guide to their Identification", 2nd edition, 2022. Joy had chosen the first site along Joseph Young Drive near the junction with Ballantinia Track, where we soon found a whole variety of different fungal species, many newly grown. Most were gilled fungi or Basidiomycota, dominated by members of the Mycena genus, but there were also examples of Bolete, Earth Star, 'turkey tails' and slime mould (not a fungus). We also couldn't help but admire the show of freshly pumped moss and lichen, particularly on the magnificent granite boulders of Mt Alexander (see photo previous page).

Eventually breaking for lunch at the Leanganook picnic ground, we then made a short visit to Whiskey Gully where we found several additional species, in particular a small grey fungus found under rotting wood that had a honeycomb-like pattern under the cap. Joy was particularly excited about this one as she had never seen it before. She has identified it as *Resupinatus aff. Merulioides* (see photo front page).

The joy of fungi searching is the amazing range of sizes, shapes, growth forms and colours that unfolds during the search. One of our early finds was the tiny *Marasmius crinis-equi* growing on the leaf litter. This fungus is also known as horse-hair fungus due to its wiry stipe (or stem). Other tiny specimens were the miniature cream-coloured "toadstools" of *Hymenotorrendiella eucalypti* growing on a Black Wattle leaf and the black "blobs" of a *Hypoxylon sp*. on some bark. Our largest specimen was a Rooting Shank, *Oudemansiella gigaspora,* which has a long rooting stem base to access nutrients from buried wood. We were pleased to find the small cups of the brilliant aqua blue *Chlorociboria aeruginascens*, and some delicate blue Pixie's Parasols, *Mycena interrupta*. Another intriguing find was a collection of small bright red "blobs" of a slime mould on a fallen log, possibly *Trichia decipiens* or *Dictydiaethalium plumbeum*. Slime moulds come in many different shapes and colours! A fungi search is a bit like a treasure hunt, as we check the different likely substrates – rotting fallen timber, tree bark, leaf litter, dung and soil.

In total we found 45 species. The full list (with notes) compiled by Joy is shown below. Members are adding their photos to iNaturalist with a link to the *Fungimap* project to aid mapping of fungi distribution and hence with their conservation. A link to iNaturalist where these photos can be seen is Mt. Alexander fungi observations.

A sample of our day's collection is shown in the photo gallery here.

Thank you Joy, and thanks also to Colin for useful discussions on IDs!

Jenny Rolland

Photo Captions clockwise from top:

1 *Chlorociboria aeruginascens* (Green Elf Cap), Jenny Rolland
2 *Deconica horizontalis* (Wood Oysterling), Joy Clusker
3 *Mycena subgalericulata,* Joy Clusker
4 *Calocera sinensis* (Pretty Horn), Yvonne Hsu
5 *Red Slime Mould*, Lou Citroën
6 *Mycena interrupta* (Pixie's Parasols), Jenny Rolland

Fungi and slime mould found on the CFNC Excursion, 12th July 2025, Mt Alexander		
Calocera sinensis	*Mycena albidofusca*	*Psilocybe coprophila*
Chlorociboria aeruginascens	*Mycena clarkeana*	*Psilocybe subaeruginosa*
Clitocybe semiocculta	*Mycena interrupta*	*Resupinatus aff. Merulioides*
Coprinellus aff. Disseminatus	*Mycena kuurkacea*	*Rhizochaete filamentosa*
Deconica horizontalis	*Mycena nargan*	*Rhodocollybia aff. incarnata*
Dentipellis leptodon	*Mycena sp.* Small and cream-white on ground.	*Schizophyllum commune*
Galerina unicolor	*Mycena sp.* Tiny in moss and lichen on Acacia.	*Scleroderma cepa*
Gymnopilus ferruginosus	*Mycena subgalericulata*	Slime mould red, possibly *Trichia decipiens* or *Dictydiaethalium plumbeum*
Heterotextus peziziformis	*Mycena subvulgaris*	*Stereum hirsutum*
Hymenotorrendiella eucalypti	*Mycoacia fuscoatra*	*Stereum illudens*
Lentinellus pulvinulus	*Oudemansiella gigaspora* (name change not confirmed)	*Stereum rugosum*
Lepista nuda	*Panaeolus sp.*	*Trametes coccinea*
Leucopaxillus eucalyptorum now *Clitocybe eucalyptorum* (name change)	*Peniophora cinerea*	*Tremella encephala*
Marasmius crinis-equi	*Pholiota communis*	*Tremella globispora*
Mycena aff. Minya, identified by a small white disc where it attaches to the substrate	*Protostropharia semiglobata*	*Tremella mesenterica*

OBSERVATIONS

Youngman's Track post planned burn late 2024

We (Euan Moore and Jenny Rolland) do a regular 20min/2ha bird survey for Connecting Country in the Walmer Forest near the corner of Youngman's Track and Woodbrook Rd. We returned recently to do our survey, interested to see how the forest was recovering from a planned burn late last year. We were pleased to see that despite loss of wattles, Cassinia and much of the understory, the eucalypt canopy had been spared. Many eucalypts were sprouting either from the base (Red Box) or as epicormics (Stringybarks) and some grass tussocks showed green shoots. There were occasional patches of Scented Sundew emerging and excitingly, some patches of orchid leaves, probably Greenhoods and Glossodia. So it seems as if this was a "cool burn" with hopefully a recovery of some spring flowering.

Youngmans Track, June 2025, post planned burn late 2024.

Lower shrub layer burnt – Golden Wattles & Cassinia, but the eucalypt canopy is spared.

Left - Patches of orchid leaves, Greenhoods, after the planned burn.

Photo: Jenny Rolland

Right - Powerful Owl (*Ninox strenua)* with remnant meal of Ring-tail Possum. Castlemaine Botanical Gardens 7th June.

Photo: Peter Turner

Yellow-footed antechinus (*Antechinus flavipes*)

In home garden, 8th June

Photo: Geoff Harris

Narrow-toed Feathertail Glider (*Acrobates pygmaeus*) - What's left of it!

Upper Loddon State Forest, 23/5/2025

Photo: Lawrie Canole

Turkey Tails (*Trametes versicolour*)

Castlemaine Botanical Gardens

Photo: Peter Turner

Left - White-necked Heron (*Ardea pacifica)*

Castlemaine Botanical Gardens 19th May

Photo: Peter Turner

Right - Joy Clusker leads the fungal ID challenge.

Joy is using a mirror to check under the cap – gills or pores?

Photo: Lou Citroën

From the Committee

We are involved in discussions with various other organisations, including Connecting Country and FOBIF (Friends of Box Ironbark Forests) about the bid to make the Victorian Goldfields region a World Heritage Site. Our concern is that the bid should properly address the environmental devastation of the gold mining era, including consideration of works to repair this damage done.

We are also working with others to lobby Council about water quality of our urban creeks. To this end, Euan Moore will write a follow-up letter to council on this issue and include photos showing the issue along a section of Forest Creek where there is grossly turbid water near a building site while just upstream the water is clear.

We have previously reported on our efforts with Birdlife Castlemaine to raise awareness about the importance of not using Second-Generation Anticoagulant Rodenticides (SGARs), and we continue to communicate with organisations and individuals who can or should take action on this, such as retailers and politicians.

The Butterfly Brochure Working Group led by Lou Citroën is well advanced in its planning to publish a glossy brochure by the end of the year, and Noel Young has started work on a fungi photo gallery for our website.

News Snippets

From the 'Australian Citizen Science Association – The litter bird-en project, Federation University of Australia'.

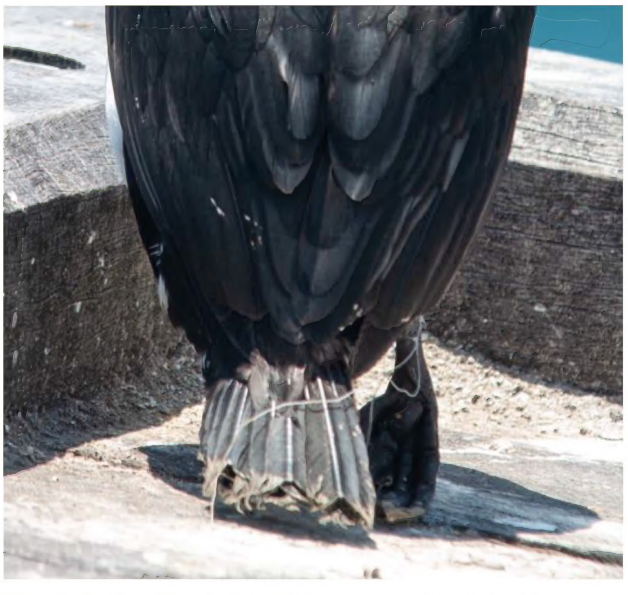
The litter bird-en team would like to provide you with an update with some preliminary findings!

Since beginning in October 2024, we have collected 143 images through our website and by direct email. These images have included 50 different bird species interacting with litter in 6 ways: ingestion, entanglement, use of litter as nesting material, use as breeding material, capture and handling, and distraction displays. The most common species have been the Australian Magpie *Gymnorhina tibicen* and the Australasian Darter *Anhinga novaehollandiae*, and the most common types of litter across all images have been off-white/clear plastics.

We are still collecting images! Please continue to submit your photos through our website: The bird-en or by direct email to ho.faraone@federation.edu.au.

We are continuing our image collection for this study through to the 16th of March, 2026. After this date, our website will still remain active however images contributed won't be able to be included in our study. Once the study is complete, we will be sure to share our findings with you!

Hannah Faraone, PhD Candidate,
Federation University Australia



The tail of a Black-faced Cormorant tangled in fishing line

From the International journal Nature's daily "Nature Briefing," of Wednesday July 16:

Long-time Briefing readers will be familiar with the work of conservation scientist Sheila Colla, who wrote compellingly alongside environmental writer Lorraine Johnson about embracing 'messy' gardens and with other colleagues about how butterflies offer lessons in resilience. I was very sorry today to hear that Colla has died, aged 43. "She leaves us: not in despair, but with instructions," writes Rhett Butler, the founder of the conservation publication Mongabay. **"Plant a native flower, upload a bee sighting, speak up for the quiet things, and sit, for a while, in awe."**

Mez Woodward

Coming Events

Monthly Meeting: Friday 8th August, 7.30pm by Zoom

"What will climate change bring to Castlemaine weather?"

Speaker: Dr Linden Ashcroft (School of Geography, Earth and Atmospheric Sciences, University of Melbourne)

Linden Ashcroft grew up in country Victoria on the lands of the Yorta Yorta people and is a senior lecturer in climate science and science communication at The University of Melbourne. Her career has spanned the academic, not-for-profit and government sectors, including a stint at the Bureau of Meteorology. Her research focuses on historical climatology, using pre-1900 documents and weather observations to improve understanding of Australia's past climate so we can better prepare for the future.

The impact of human-induced climate change is clear on Victoria's temperature, with graphs showing relentless warming trends. But the impact of climate change on rainfall is trickier to find. Are things getting wetter or drier? Is the 'green drought' a sign of things to come? And how can we talk about this stuff in a way that makes people act to avoid the worst impacts of a warmer world?

In this presentation, award-winning climate scientist and communicator Dr Linden Ashcroft will share recent research on our local rainfall patterns, untangling the role of climate change from our natural swings of wet and dry weather. She'll also share what the science says about climate change communication: what works, what doesn't and the power of a good conversation.

How to join the Zoom meeting – you need to **register in advance** to receive the link for joining the Zoom session. To register, please click on the following link or copy this url into your browser:

https://us06web.zoom.us/meeting/register/muzlbYJeSGuGUcwjY0cuHw

We recommend joining the session 5 – 10 minutes before the meeting to avoid congestion at 7.30pm.

Observations: We would all love to hear of your recent interesting observations at the meeting. Contributions from both members and visitors are welcome. Please email any photos to illustrate your report as uncropped JPEG file(s) to Jill Williams (jilliwill33@gmail.com) by noon on the day of the meeting.

Grazing paddock in drought at Strangways, March 2025. Photo: Jill Williams

Coming Events contd.

Excursion: Saturday 9th August, 10.00am, "Grassland Treasures", Baringhup

Leader: Kerrie Jennings

At our July Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club meeting, Adrian Marshall (Grassy Plains Network) reminded us that only 1% of Victoria's native grasslands remain and they're rapidly disappearing without recognition and protection. Small patches remain, often with just a few plants, but knowledge of grassland species and locations is limited.

Our first of three roadside stops to examine remnant grasslands/grassy woodlands will be at the Cnr. Hayes and Baringhup Roads, Baringhup. We'll continue to Baringhup West where we'll see a *Pimelea spinescens* (Critically Endangered grassland species) project site and visit a remnant grassy Buloke Woodland. Along the way we'll search for native grassland plants and consider how we might value, protect and restore what little grassland we have left.

Meet: at the northern end of the Car Park north of the Railway Goods Shed, Kennedy St Castlemaine for a prompt **10.00am** departure (car-pooling as much as possible) or meet at **10.20am** at the corner of Hayes and Baringhup Roads (Google Maps link).

Bring: Water, snacks, **clean** sturdy shoes, chairs and lunch.

Roadside Clean-up, Monday 11th August, 9.00am

Help keep our stretch of the Pyrenees Highway clean!

Our club checks a section of the Pyrenees Highway four times a year, west of Castlemaine from the top of McKenzie's Hill to Woodman's Road. It is always a pleasant walk along some interesting roadside bush as we do our bit for the community.

Meet: 9am near Tait's Decorative Iron, corner of Willy Milly Rd and Pyrenees Highway, Castlemaine.

Bring: Gloves, water, sturdy footwear. Garbage bags and safety vests supplied.

Contact: Geoff Harris (mob 0418 392 183) if you can help with the clean-up..

Reminder: CFNC September monthly events will be held at Wedderburn, 12-14 September

Registrations (see below) are required by August 8th to confirm attendance and organise car-pooling.

Speakers and excursion leaders – ecologist Professor Michael Kearney from the University of Melbourne and local orchid expert and CFNC member, Russell Stanley.

Itinerary: Dinner and guest speaker on Friday and Saturday evenings, excursions to nearby nature reserves on Saturday and Sunday.

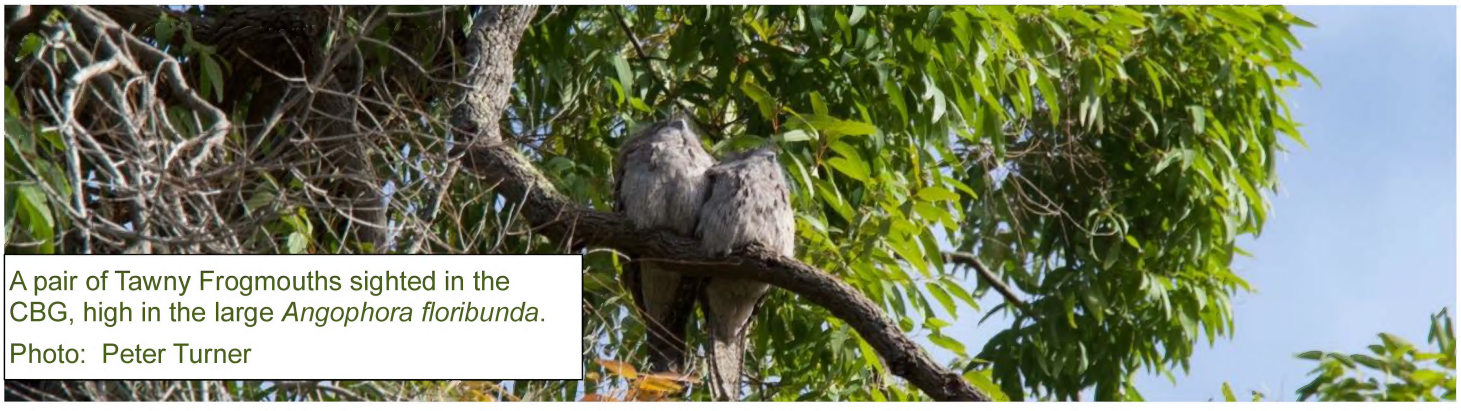
Attendees must organise their own **accommodation** (see options and further details on the weekend in the July "Castlemaine Naturalist" newsletter).

Registration (covers evening meals and meeting room hire): $90 per person for 2 nights ($45 for one night).

> Please pay into the Club bank account **by 8th August**. Make sure you put your name as the reference on your bank transfer. Bank account details - Name: Castlemaine Field Naturalists; BSB: 633000; Account: 110396256.

Confirm payment: Please email Jenny Rolland jennifer.rolland@monash.edu to advise that payment has been made and whether you require or can help with transport.

Enquiries: Jenny Rolland 0400 565 092, jennifer.rolland@monash.edu.



A pair of Tawny Frogmouths sighted in the CBG, high in the large *Angophora floribunda*.

Photo: Peter Turner

Program

Monthly meetings are being held on-line via Zoom during the winter months (June, July and August) commencing at 7.30pm. Please register in advance (see "Coming Events" page) to receive the link for joining the meeting.

Members and visitors are invited to share their interesting observations at these meetings. Please email any photos to illustrate your report as uncropped JPEG file(s) to Jill Williams (jilliwill33@gmail.com) by noon on the day of the meeting.

Excursions are held on the Saturday following the monthly meeting and leave from the northern end of the car park north of the Railway Goods Shed, Kennedy St. at 1.30pm unless stated otherwise.

See "Coming Events" page for more details about August events.

Fri 8th August, 7.30pm
Meeting (Zoom): "What will climate change bring to Castlemaine weather? "
Speaker: Dr Linden Ashcroft, School of Geography, Earth and Atmospheric Sciences, University of Melbourne

Sat 9th August, 10.00am
Excursion: "Grassland treasures", Baringhup
Leader: Kerrie Jennings

Mon 11th August, 9.00am
Roadside Clean-up
Meet Tait's Decorative Iron, corner Willy Milly Rd and Pyrenees Highway.

Fri 12th-Sun 14th September
CFNC Weekend at Wedderburn (see information and registration details on Coming Events page)

Weds 10th, 24th September 4.00pm
Wednesday Wildflower Wanders

See our website calendar of events for further dates and activities:
Calendar of Events – Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club

Visitors are welcome at club activities

Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Inc. #A0003010B

castlemainefieldnaturalists.org.au

castlemainefnc@hotmail.com

PO Box 324, Castlemaine, 3450

Membership – fees due 1st April
Includes the monthly newsletter, Castlemaine Naturalist.
(Membership forms on CFNC website)
Single $35, Family $50
Pensioner or student:
Single $25, Family $30

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Email items:
newsletter.cfnc@gmail.com
Sep. edition deadline: **29th August**

Committee
President:
Euan Moore (0407 519 091)
Vice-President: Vacant
Secretary: Cathrine Harboe-Ree
Treasurer: Geoff Harris

Committee:
Lou Citroën Peter Turner
Kerrie Jennings Jill Williams
Jenny Rolland Noel Young

Newsletter Editors: Noel Young, Jenny Rolland, Jill Williams

Program Coordinator:
Jenny Rolland

Newsletter Distributor:
Geraldine Harris

The Nodding Greenhood Pterostylis nutans is the club emblem. Design by Rita Mills

Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the contributors and not necessarily those of the club.